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Bird in Hand: A Play
in One Act: by Laurence
Housman

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By LAURENCE HOUSMAN

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BIRD IN HAND.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

PROFESSOR BRAINTREE.....	<i>A famous scientist</i>
MISS TUCKEY.....	<i>His secretary</i>
DR. LOCUM.....	<i>His medical attendant</i>
ELFRIDA.....	<i>His granddaughter</i>
BIRD-IN-HAND.....	<i>A thing to be explained</i>

BIRD IN HAND

SCENE:—*You are looking into the study of a Scientist—a large room lined with books and specimen cases. At the back are two upright windows, through which one sees a green bowery garden, suggestive of quiet and seclusion. In one window stands a case of stuffed birds, in the other a microscope. Near the center of the room is a ponderous writing-table, above which hangs an adjustable light, presided over by a large green shade. Adjoining the writing-table is a smaller one, on which stands a typewriter. All about the room, on tables and systematically arranged, and suggestive of the strict order imposed by a meticulous mind. There is one door to right, another to left, the latter leading to an inner chamber. On the writing-table lie papers and a portable speaking-tube. A telephone, a waste-paper basket, and a revolving book-stand are within easy reach of the PROFESSOR'S chair, while behind it is a screen partly covering the door leading to the inner chamber. On the opposite side, between the other door and the window, stands a large chest. It is morning, and through half-lowered green blinds sunlight streams over the replete and comfortable interior, touching to brightness the polished metal of the microscope, and the plumage of the stuffed birds.*

At the small table, on a chair less comfortable than the one at the writing-desk sits an

old gentleman in an affluent dressing-gown of deep rich tones, dividing his attention between a bowl of "Benger's Food" and the typewriter, at which he clicks with portentous gravity and occasional pauses in the fingering. He is evidently inexperienced, perhaps through short-sightedness; but the typewriter helps him to feel, even in his study, that his words are destined for print and the laying-down of the scientific law for the generations to come after.

The clock on the chimney-piece, a skeleton of severe design, with the workings of its metal bowels immodestly exposed, strikes eleven. This seems to be a signal to a mind methodically trained. The PROFESSOR consults his watch, starts, looks reproachfully at the clock, then quits the typewriter, picks up his bowl of Benger, and spooning from it on the way goes to the speaking-tube, which having unstopped, he breathes into. The exertion sets him coughing; but he does this, like most other things, patiently and methodically. After listening at the tube he speaks down it, and you hear a bisected conversation.

PROFESSOR BRAINTREE. Is that you, Miss Tuckey?
—Yes, I'm ready for you—I'm ready, I say—if you will, please. Yes. (He starts to put on the stopper again; then, as an after-thought)—Oh! Miss Tuckey—Are you there?—Tut! Tut! Why does the woman hurry so? (HE gets up a little testily to remove his Benger bowl to a side-table, and progressing with very short steps places it unsecurely on a projecting book whence it falls and breaks. HE accepts the fact philosophically so far as infirmity will allow; but there is a gentle querulousness in his tone as he says—) There, there! Oh dear!—(And leaving the fragments to lie, returns to his place. There he stands for a moment,

and looking back reproachfully, removes from his eyes the highly magnifying reading-glasses which were the cause of the mishaps. He replaces them by another pair which permit a wider range of vision. Through these he is able to contemplate the entrance of MISS TUCKEY, a subdued machine of a woman, who accepts, without kick of any kind, the mould she has been poured into.)

MISS TUCKEY. Good-morning, Sir.

(Like a well-fed fish catching at a fly from mere habit, the PROFESSOR engulfs and returns the salutation by an inaudible movement of the lips.)

PROFESSOR. Miss Tuckey, there is something broken over there, will you please see it removed? And will you kindly make a note to write to Messrs. Spink and Wedge, and say that these new glasses don't suit me—I find them very trying to the—*(About to say "temper," he substitutes)*—to the eyes. And I must ask you to fetch those proofs which came yesterday. I tried to catch you just now, but you had gone.

(In this statement there is a note of rebuke for a too precipitate obedience to summons. But by the foresight of MISS TUCKEY, the proofs are there; she deposits them in front of him.)

PROFESSOR. Oh, very well. Thank you. Any letters? *(Those also she deposits, in two heaps, the business ones opened, the private and personal untouched)* When did these come?

MISS TUCKEY. Most of them last night, sir, after you had gone to bed.

(The PROFESSOR, tentatively inspecting them, remembers that he must change his glasses again. The magnifying lens proves informative.)

PROFESSOR. Ah! here is one from Miss Elfrida, I see.

MISS TUCKEY. (*As she collects and removes the fragments of the Bengers Food bowl*) That only came this morning.

PROFESSOR. Wasn't she to be "back to-day?"

MISS TUCKEY. Yes. They are expecting her quite soon. About twelve, I believe. (*The PROFESSOR looks at his watch, and then remembers that he has fault to find with the clock, and incidentally with her*)

PROFESSOR. That clock is three quarters of a minute slow, Miss Tucky. (*MISS TUCKEY at once goes to correct it*) It should now be at four and a quarter minutes past. A clock that loses time is so disturbing—especially when it strikes. It puts me out of my stride for the rest of the day. (*He begins looking at his correspondence*) And now, if you will attend to *me*! (*MISS TUCKEY is already standing meekly to attention*) You have your notebook?

MISS TUCKEY. Yes, sir.

PROFESSOR. Take this, then! (*He consults once more the letter which he has picked up from his opened correspondence*)—"Mr. James Pomeroy." (*I think it is Pomeroy*)—He writes on good note-paper with a crest; I suppose I must answer him. "Dear Sir"—Oh! while I think of it, make a note that the extra plates for the new edition of "Objective Science" have not come through as advised; and they must not go to press till I have passed them. What have you got?

MISS TUCKEY. "Mr. James Pomeroy, Dear Sir."

PROFESSOR. No, better make it "Sir." These parasitic correspondents ought not to be encouraged. "I beg to acknowledge receipt"—no, "I *have* to acknowledge"—*have*—"the receipt of your letter"—date so and so. "With the proposition therein set forth, I cannot find myself in agreement. The limits

of sensory receptivity are patent to every scientist."

MISS TUCKEY. The limits of what?—I beg pardon.

PROFESSOR. "Sen-sory re-ceptivity"—in other words, the receptivity of the senses. "That fact, however, does not provide any legitimate ground for a belief in those magical or supernatural occurrences through which, as I apprehend, you seek to counter-balance the deductions of science. I find no reason to doubt that however much still lies beyond the apprehension of our senses, it must all nevertheless be within the range of a scientific explanation. I am, Sir, yours faithfully"—(*He takes up another letter*) Oh, that is from Messrs. Moody & Prose. Just say "received," and have made a note. This is to take the chair at the International Science Conference for the discussion on the "Homology of the Invertebrates." Say I accept the honor and am their obedient servant—That is, no. That is "no"—(*He hands letter*) That impertinence you need not answer—And now, take this—"Mrs. Daphnephoria Brown—the Seminary, Brunswickville, Connecticut"—"My Dear Madam, Your very flattering proposal to arrange a compendium from my various studies in Objective Science, entitled 'Sufficient unto the Day,' and intended to provide a basis for the accurate biological training of the very young, gives gratifying evidence of the interest you take in and the value which you attach to my literary labors. I am inclined, however, to think that the terminological exactitude so necessary to scientific statement could not be accommodated to the range of the child-mind without a certain damage to the content"—Of course, that means to the scientific content, not to the child's mind. (No, no, don't take that! That was only commentary—"Should I, on later consideration, see any possible adjustment of my works to your proposed scheme I shall not fail to communicate with you further in the

matter. I am, dear Madam, yours very truly"—That you can destroy, and the address you need not keep. (*He hands over the letter to Miss TUCKEY*) And I think that is all—Oh, will you fetch me the file of Professor Lake Jones' articles on the "Rudiments of Corpuscular Gravity" which appeared in last year's "Science Journal." You will find it in the Press Bureau, I think, under "R." (*Miss TUCKEY goes to look for the file in the small inner chamber, from which, as she opens the door, comes a brighter light of day than enters the study through the tempering green blinds*) And now for Elfrida. (*He opens letter*) Well, well, well! What is she sending me this botanical specimen for, I wonder? It looks like a leaf of the Hornbeam—*Carpinus Betulus*, if I am not mistaken. (*He examines the leaf, then lays it down and returns to the letter*) Dear me! The child has such a hand-writing that I can't read a word of it. Miss Tuckey, your eyes are better than mine, will you kindly read me this letter?

(*MISS TUCKEY has returned with the required file. She puts it down and takes up the letter.*)

MISS TUCKEY. "Dearest Grandpapa"—

PROFESSOR. Yes, yes, I read that.

MISS TUCKEY. "I am coming back to-morrow—I have had a lovely time. So did Benjy: we went everywhere together, but he always would go into the water, and I had to stay out——"

PROFESSOR. Benjy is the dog, I believe.

MISS TUCKEY. "That was wrong of him, wasn't it?—To-day in the wood I saw a tree full of fairies, it was wonderful. But when I came they all climbed up and hid behind the leaves, so I wasn't able to catch one. But I send you a leaf off the tree, so as to show it was a real one, and not what you call my 'magination'——"

PROFESSOR. Oh, so that's what the botanical specimen is for, is it?—Yes?—

MISS TUCKEY. "Please keep it till I come, then I will tell you all about it——"

PROFESSOR. Miss Tuckey, I wish you would not leave that door open! There's a dreadful draught at my back.

MISS TUCKEY. It isn't open sir.

PROFESSOR. Well, there's a draught somewhere—Quite a wind! It seemed to come all of a sudden; and there! it has blown away Miss Elfrida's leaf that was here a moment ago. (*He friggles and moves his head uneasily, as though the draught still afflicted him*) You had better re-arrange that screen. Well, is that all the letter?

MISS TUCKEY. Yes, sir, except she sends her love. (*SHE goes and re-arranges the screen*)

PROFESSOR. Very well. That is all, thank you, for the present. Just draw down those blinds before you go. The light is too strong, it tries my eyes. (*MISS TUCKEY lowers the blinds*) I should be glad to have that article for Hibbered's copied before post-time.

MISS TUCKEY. Certainly, sir.

PROFESSOR. And when Miss Elfrida comes will you send her up to me?

MISS TUCKEY. Yes, sir.

(*SHE collects her papers and goes out, and the PROFESSOR settles to his writing. Putting aside ELFRIDA'S letter, conspicuous by reason of its being written on pink paper, reminds him of the vanished leaf. He gives a momentary look for it to right and left: but the thing is unimportant, and dismissing it, he gets to work. This so entirely absorbs him that he is unaware of being looked at. Above the top of the writing-table a pair of strange eyes gradually emerge. Dark and insect-like, they stare at him*)

out of a small green face, sharp, queer, and suggestive of a brain with a vivacious but detached standpoint. Out of the head sprout long horns or antennae; the creature is a curious mixture of beetle, bird, and grasshopper. Its color from head to foot is bright green. Fixing on the PROFESSOR a stare of uninformed and quite unintelligent interrogation, it moves slowly round the writing-table till it stands opposite to him. Presently it smacks its lips, and begins a soft jabber to itself, not much louder than the whip of leaves on a window-pane.)

BIRD-IN-HAND. Quit-a-quit! Quit-a-quit! Quit-a-quit!

(The PROFESSOR, thinking he hears something, looks up through his reading-glasses, and cannot believe his eyes. At once his grievance is against the optician.)

PROFESSOR. Really!—these glasses!—How they do strain one's eyes! (He takes them off, and puts on his distance-glasses; but the apparition remains, vibrating up and down on its toes as though rather pleased with itself. The PROFESSOR considers it from a variety of attitudes, and with a growing apprehension that he really is seeing something) Dear me, now! This is most extraordinary!—It almost makes me believe my eyes. (He endeavors to reconstruct his thoughts on scientific lines)—Now, let me think, let me think! How many cups of green-tea did I have this morning?

BIRD-IN-HAND. Sik-silk-silk-silk-silk-silk-silk!

PROFESSOR. Six, I believe it was!—Did that thing speak? (A pause)

BIRD-IN-HAND. (With a slow, meditative, rather plaintive introduction) Chwee-e-weet!

PROFESSOR. But, but this is an hallucination!

BIRD-IN-HAND. Chich-a-wee!

PROFESSOR. An hallucination, I say!

BIRD-IN-HAND. Chich-a-wee!

PROFESSOR. (*Trying to reject the evidence of his senses*) No, no, no!—I must be ill!—Overwork!

BIRD-IN-HAND. Chip-chip-chip-chip-chewee-e-e!

PROFESSOR. What—Am I going out of my senses? (*He makes a dive for the telephone*) Station 1228, please—yes! 1 double 2, 8!

BIRD-IN-HAND. Two-eight! Two-eight!—Eight! eight! eight! eight! eight! eight!

(*The note is still yow and plaintive, but the PROFESSOR gets more and more frightened.*)

PROFESSOR. I can't bear this; I can't bear it!—My nerves won't stanr it!—

BIRD-IN-HAND. Chip it!—Chip it!

(*The 'phone calls him.*)

PROFESSOR. Is Doctor Locum—? Oh, Doctor, is that you?—Will you, please, come and see me at once?—Braintree—Professor Braintree. Yes—most urgent—I'm afraid I've, I've—broken down.

BIRD-IN-HAND. What? What? What? What? What?

PROFESSOR. No, no, a blood-vessel!—But do come immediately!—*Yes*. Don't lose a moment, I beg—Good-bye—

BIRD-IN-HAND. Sh-sh-sh-wee! Sh-sh-sh-wee!—Oh, why?—Oh, why?—Oh, why?—Spit-it-out! Spit-it-out!

(*The PROFESSOR with a gorgonized stare has been trying to rule the thing out; now by a firm effort of will he seeks to dismiss it from his mind.*)

PROFESSOR. No, no, it's not there! I don't see it, I don't see it, I don't see it. I——

(But he does see it; that's the trouble. It advances its head slowly towards him, then draws it back again, and with a more cheerful note than before, as if to encourage him, remarks:)

BIRD-IN-HAND. Che-wit!

(At this the PROFESSOR shuts his eyes, and continues to exercise his will-power, under conditions which make the assertion more tenable.)

PROFESSOR. I don't see it and I won't see it! I won't see it!—I—I dismiss it entirely from my mind. It isn't there! *(While he is thus tackling the problem the creature shifts its position, and now standing at his back, views him from a fresh standpoint with the same blank stare of a curiosity that comprehends nothing. The PROFESSOR opens his eyes again. Will-power has apparently prevailed. He no longer sees the object of his aversion)* That's better! *(He begins cautiously to turn his head first to right then to left. It gives him a great start to find the green horned creature close behind him. This is too much like having a caterpillar down his back for equanimity. Irrespressibly he jumps up)*

PROFESSOR. Get out!

BIRD-IN-HAND. Che-wee—che-wee—chewee—chewee—chewee! *(The creature flies off crying like a startled black-bird. The PROFESSOR, seeing that it responds to voice and gesture, tries driving it)*

PROFESSOR. Shoo! Shoo, get out with you! Scat! But no, no, I mustn't do that! If I do that, I shall end by making myself think it exists. No, I must endeavor to dismiss it from my mind. There! There! Now it's gone.

(Leaning his head on his hand, he sits with munching mouth, wriggling nervously in his seat. Meantime the creature, sliding alongside the table, and touching things tentatively with its claw-like fingers, lights on the typewriter. As the click of the instrument catches its fancy, it makes a scrambling attack upon the keys with accompanying noise curiously resembling the well-known saw: "PETER PIPER picked a peck of pickled pepper corns." That, however, is merely coincidence—the sounds it emits being merely a running commentary on the letter P.)

BIRD-IN-HAND. Peet-a-pipe!—Pick-a-peck—Pick-a-peppa-kum!—E-peet-a-pipe—a pick-a-pick—a-pick-a-pepp a-kum. Wees-a-peck, a pick-a-peppa-kum. Peet-a-pipe-a-pick!

(At this outburst of oratory the PROFESSOR, after sitting spellbound for a moment, makes a vicious flick with his handkerchief, and the green imp ducks and disappears.)

PROFESSOR. Well—I—hope I'm better! *(This hope is almost at once put to rout. The PROFESSOR apprehensively snatches back his feet from the knee-hole of the writing-table, and his brain is once more seized by panic)* Oh! I felt it! I felt it—I'm out of all my senses now!—If this keeps on much longer, I shall go stark staring mad!

(But now the creature's interest is diverted elsewhere. Rising and pirouetting across the room, it comes suddenly upon the case of stuffed birds, and stands transfixed with astonishment. These frozen bits of bird-life seem to baffle its wits. It taps the glass-case, and after a close scrutiny

tries with sounds and a flapping motion of the hands to coax the occupants back to life.)

BIRD-IN-HAND. Chich-a-wee! Chich-a-wee!—
Tweet, tweet! Wee-wee-wee! Chick-a-wake!—
Oh, why?—Tickle 'em up! Too-to-weet! Too-to-
weet!—Eat, eat, eat, eat, eat, eat! Quick, quick!
Josophat! Josophat! Whit-a-woo?—Drink-and-
eat! Tr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

PROFESSOR. Oh! But this is horrible!—It's true!
It *really exists!* (*He sits petrified*)

BIRD-IN-HAND. Tr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

PROFESSOR. And I don't!—I don't!—I don't!

BIRD-IN-HAND. Cheer-up! Cheer-up! Cheer-
up!—Oh, why? (*Petrification gives way to fury*)

PROFESSOR. Stop it! Stop it, I say! (*He picks
up a pamphlet and throws it with random aim, this
hit-or-miss has little effect. A deep sadness at its
failure to rouse the birds has taken the tree-imp.
Crying in a low plaintive note it turns towards him*)

BIRD-IN-HAND. Wee-wee! wee-wee-wee!

(*It advances slowly towards him. The PROFESSOR
makes a grab at the speaking-tube, and blows,
then speaks down it.*)

PROFESSOR. Miss Tuckey, are you there! Miss
Tuckey!

BIRD-IN-HAND. (*Halting for a moment*) Tuckey,
tuckey, tuckey—Tuck!—tuck!—tuck!

PROFESSOR. Would you come up, please, for one
moment!

BIRD-IN-HAND. (*Secretively*) Sh—sh—wee!
(*As if on a tour of exploration, it disappears behind
the screen at his back*)

PROFESSOR. Now I shall know whether I am mad
or not. Yes, I shall know!—(*Enter MISS TUCKEY.
The PROFESSOR faces her in some confusion. The
relief of her presence lets him down and it is hard*

for him to collect his wits) I—I—I want you to see that those proofs go, Miss Tuckey—by the first post.

MISS TUCKEY. Yes, sir—(*She looks a little surprised and nonplussed*) Did you want anything else, sir?

PROFESSOR. Oh, well, and if you would kindly rearrange that screen? I still feel rather a draught.

(*MISS TUCKEY goes and readjusts the screen. It is evident that, as she goes behind it, no apparition confronts her; she emerges as machine-like as ever, calm and collected.*)

MISS TUCKEY. Will that be as you wish?

PROFESSOR. Thank you.

MISS TUCKEY. Is that all, sir?

PROFESSOR. Yes, that is all. (*He looks cautiously round, and as she goes out gets up and looks behind the screen himself. Nothing is there*) But this is horrible! I saw it! Oh! if I didn't see it, I'm going mad!

(*Almost immediately in another part of the room the apparition re-appears.*)

BIRD-IN-HAND. Peweeet, peweeet! Chus-luk-a-mee! Chus-luk-a-mee!

(*With this, the spring cry of the peewit, sounding so much like "Just look at me!" it displays a hitherto unsuspected power of levitation in a series of surprising bounds into air, as though its feet went up from spring-boards.*)

PROFESSOR. Ah! Now then! Now!

(*From a corner rack behind him the PROFESSOR snatches a large green butter-fly net, and for a few moments you have the degrading spectacle*

of an eminent scientist, pursuing on the material plane something which he does not really believe to exist. But the pursuit soon ends. The imp is too agile, the pace is too killing, and the PROFESSOR in his stumbling course has knocked over a number of things that he did not intend to. Exhausted, he sits down again to breathe. Once more the creature has disappeared. Thus momentarily relieved, he perceives the disarray into which the chamber has been thrown, and proceeds to pick things up. Apparently from its place of concealment the creature is watching him, for almost immediately he hears its voice.)

BIRD-IN-HAND. Pick-it-up! Pick-it-up!

(To be thus ordered about by an apparition is trying to the PROFESSOR'S temper. He slaps down his gleanings on the table, and makes a second grab for the butterfly net.)

PROFESSOR. No—no, I mustn't do that: it's no good. I must think!

BIRD-IN-HAND. Think—think—think—think—think!

PROFESSOR. I will just go on with my writing——

BIRD-IN-HAND. Do it!—do it!—do it!

PROFESSOR. —as if nothing had happened at all—Perhaps it hasn't! *(But again the creature has re-appeared)* Oh, do get away!

BIRD-IN-HAND. Chich-a-wee! Che-wee! *(Realizing it is not wanted, it roams off and begins once more to inspect the room. Before long it runs its finger down a pile of papers high up on a shelf, and the papers tip over and fly out across the floor. Fleeing before them)* Che-wee—Che-wee—Che-wee, Che-wee—Che-wee!

(*The PROFESSOR is now so angry that he has left off being frightened. He jumps up to rescue his papers.*)

PROFESSOR. Hallucination, you are a perfect nuisance!

BIRD-IN-HAND. (*Coaxingly*) Che-wee-wee?
(*The PROFESSOR collects the strewn papers from the floor; and as he goes about gathering them up, the creature follows him, with round inquisitive eyes at all he does. He opens chest and begins to deposit the papers inside. Curious to spy into this new interior, the creature stretches out a hands.*)

PROFESSOR. (*Very irritably*) Why can't you let things alone?

BIRD-IN-HAND. (*Derisively*) Chich-e-wee!
(*With a sportive dive it plunges into the chest, tossing up the loosely arranged papers into fresh confusion. On this last bit of exasperating frivolity the PROFESSOR slams down the lid, and locks it; and the tree imp is boxed up within. It takes him a moment or two to realize his triumph. It is a little difficult, indeed, to know on what lines to take it. Has the locking of the chest, with the hallucination inside, disposed of the hallucination? His doubt is solved almost at once, for from the inside of the chest the hallucination once more becomes audible*) What? What? What?—I say! Let it out! Let it out! Quick! Quick!—Oh, why?—(*A pause. The PROFESSOR stands considering; he has the key. He retreats toward the table, and lays it down. The chest continues to give forth sound. A tapping begins upon the lid, and in a gradual diminuendo the chattering goes on. The PROFESSOR dips a pen, and tries to resume his writing, but his interest is still held*) I say! I say! I say! Pick it

out! Pick it out! What? What?—What? What?—What? What? What? What? What? What?—Tweet-weet! wee, wee, wee, wee! Oh, why?—What?— Oh, why?— What?— Oh, why?

(The sound is now so faint that the PROFESSOR can scarcely hear. He again dips his pen and resolutely starts writing. There comes another "Oh, why" which he does not hear. His nerves are recovering somewhat, encouraged by the ensuing silence; but he gives a sharp start when the whistle of the speaking-tube blows. He unstops it and listens.)

PROFESSOR. Oh, yes. Will you ask him to wait one moment? *(He gets up and goes cautiously toward the chest, stops and listens at it for a moment, with apprehension that turns to a sort of doubtful relief)* Nothing, nothing there, at all! *(Nevertheless, he gives a last look of suspicion, and pauses one last second before again applying his mouth to the speaking-tube)* Ask Dr. Locum to come up. *(Catching sight of the butterfly-net, he goes to put it away, and has just done so when the DOCTOR enters.)*

DOCTOR. How are you, Professor? Nothing very serious, I hope---

(THE PROFESSOR holds himself in. He is now feeling a little aggrieved at the shock he has experienced.)

PROFESSOR. Doctor, I--I want you to examine me, before I--before I say anything.

DOCTOR. Examine you?—in what way?

PROFESSOR. Just find out my symptoms—my state of health, generally.

DOCTOR. Well, Professor, let's see the tongue! Then I'll take your temperature—Sleep well?

PROFESSOR. Much as usual.

DOCTOR. Appetite good?

PROFESSOR. Yes—fairly. (*At this moment in goes the thermometer, and the PROFESSOR becomes temporarily speechless. The DOCTOR feels his pulse, looking at his watch meanwhile*)

DOCTOR. Hours? Have you been keeping late hours

PROFESSOR. M—m! (*Assisted by gestures this sound stands for "no"*)

DOCTOR. Everything quite regular—as usual?

PROFESSOR. M—m (*This time it means "yes"*)

DOCTOR. Yes: the pulse is a little bit agitated. Have you been putting yourself to any unusual exertion lately?

PROFESSOR. M—m! (*This melancholy moan of affirmation is emphasised by a motion of the head. And the PROFESSOR's eyes turn toward the chest*)

DOCTOR. Ah! but you shouldn't do that! you must take more care of yourself. Your heart isn't what it was. Mustn't expect it at your age. Now then, let's see! (*Withdraws and examines thermometer*)

PROFESSOR. Circumstances, over which I have no control, *caused* me to exert myself.

DOCTOR. Well you know, there's not much wrong. Temperature about normal.

PROFESSOR. Doctor, a most extraordinary thing has just happened. I must tell you about it.

DOCTOR. H'm—h'm? (*He sits down*)

PROFESSOR. I was sitting here at my work—I was writing—there! as you see. Does that in any way look agitated? (*Shows him a paper*)

DOCTOR. I should not say so.

PROFESSOR. Does it make any sense?

DOCTOR. "When all the objective data presented to sense-receptivity are compared, and the differentiations of their varying incentives and reactions properly allowed for—" Well, I should say so—not that I altogether understand it.

PROFESSOR No, but it is constructive? -Would you say the man who wrote that was out of his senses?

DOCTOR. Most certainly not!

PROFESSOR. I only wish to show that I was in the full possession of my faculties, my ordinary work-a-day mind.

DOCTOR. Very well, Professor, I accept that.

PROFESSOR. Well— Suddenly I glanced up, and there I saw a horrid little green thing looking at me—with eyes!

DOCTOR. Yes: it would have eyes, if it was looking at you.

PROFESSOR. Very curious eyes, Doctor,—like a young bird's; and it had horns also— And—well, there it was, you know!— At first I didn't believe it, I thought it was green tea—I tried to dismiss it from my mind altogether. But—it wouldn't let me. Before I knew where I was, it—it spoke to me.

DOCTOR. Did you speak to *it*?

PROFESSOR. Yes, I did.

DOCTOR. Fatal thing to do, Professor. Of course in that way you encouraged the—the phantasy.

PROFESSOR. Ah, but it was not *I* who spoke first— At least I was only talking to myself. And suddenly it said—"Six, six, six, six, six,"—just like that!

DOCTOR. Was that in answer to anything?

PROFESSOR. Well, in a sort of way, yes—I had just said to myself: "Now, how many cups of green tea did I have this morning?"—And then it made the remark.

DOCTOR. And six *was* the number?

PROFESSOR. There, or thereabouts.

DOCTOR. Very well, Professor. Now, better not think any more about it. I'll make you up a prescription. And you had better quite knock off that green tea for a little while.

PROFESSOR. But that's not all, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Do you think you need tell me any more?

PROFESSOR. Yes. You don't how *real* it seemed.

DOCTOR. It would give you that impression.

PROFESSOR. But even now.

DOCTOR. Yes, yes. But there will be a reaction. That will pass.

PROFESSOR. But—Doctor—I'm not satisfied.

DOCTOR. You will be. Don't dwell on it! You'll get all right again. Don't work too much at night, and don't sit up late.

PROFESSOR. I go to bed regularly every night at a quarter to ten.

DOCTOR. Good! Then just for the present make it half-past nine.

PROFESSOR. Doctor, I want to explain— At first, of course, I took the view that *you* take. I did not for a moment believe that such a thing could exist. I regarded it as an hallucination. But later on, it—well I came to think otherwise—It did such a lot of things—that I could not myself have conceived—and once it actually touched me. That was a great shock.

DOCTOR. Yes, it would be, naturally. But you were indulging the——

PROFESSOR. No, no, Doctor, I was *not*. I— Well, now what I want to tell you is this. When I began to think that there was something real about it after all, I—then, I'm sorry to say, I let myself go, and I pursued it—all over the room.

DOCTOR. Any good?

PROFESSOR. None whatever. I knocked over a few things, that's all. I was picking them up just before you came in.

DOCTOR. Well, and then?

(*The PROFESSOR's eye travels toward the chest; but he is unable to confess himself quite honestly.*)

PROFESSOR. Then—it disappeared.

DOCTOR. And you haven't seen it since?

PROFESSOR. No.

DOCTOR. Nor heard it?

PROFESSOR. I have not—. That is, *no*.

DOCTOR. Well, then, that's all right.

PROFESSOR. I hope so. Doctor, I haven't quite explained to you the shock it was to me. It was that terrible moment when I thought that, after all, there might be something in it! At that moment I saw all my life's work disappear. All my science, all my philosophy—gone! Everything I had written—worth nothing!

DOCTOR. Well, well, but don't dwell on it!

PROFESSOR. It was terrible!

DOCTOR. But it wasn't true.

PROFESSOR. No— But for a moment it seemed true. That is really what-what gave me such a shock

DOCTOR. Well, it's over. Now, don't think any more of it. That is the best cure. You say you haven't been sleepless?

PROFESSOR. No—but I shall be.

DOCTOR. Oh, no. We'll see to that! I'll send you the right thing. To-night you'll sleep like a top. (*He gets up to go.*)

PROFESSOR. Thank you. Good-bye. (*The DOCTOR starts to go*) You don't think that I'm really off my head, do you?

DOCTOR. No, no, Nerves a little bit upset, that's all!—a little too much work, a little too much sitting still, a little too much indoors—and a little too much green tea. Many a little makes a mickle.

PROFESSOR. I don't want it to occur again, Doctor.

DOCTOR. It shan't, sir, it shan't! Now, good-bye; I must be off!

PROFESSOR. Thank you. Good-bye. (*The DOCTOR goes out. The PROFESSOR stands looking at the chest*) And to think how I saw it go in there! (*He goes and stands by the chest; listens for a long time, then taps*) Is anyone—? —Is anything there?—Ah! That's all right, then!— I hope. (*He goes*)

back to his seat. Then his eye falls on the key; he takes hold of it, and is about to get up again. With an effort he sits back, letting the key go) No, I will not!— But suppose—suppose it were there after all! No, no, no—. It wouldn't do at all. Everybody would think that I was mad— Well, I must—I must try to get on with my work. *(He composes himself to write. Presently there enters an attractive little figure in a knitted cap, jersey, and skirt of bright green. This is ELFRIDA. She advances very quietly, with a roguish smile, stops at the table and stands looking at him. Suddenly, with the tail of his eye, the PROFESSOR catches sight of her. It gives him a dreadful start; but a look at her over the top of his glasses reassures him)* Effie! Why, Effie, my dear, what a start you gave me!

ELFRIDA. *(Getting nearer the truth than she knows)* You thought I was a fairy.

PROFESSOR. No, I didn't think you were a fairy. I thought you were an hallucination!

ELFRIDA. What's that?

PROFESSOR. Something that's not real, my dear.

(ELFRIDA has sidled round to the back of his chair; and now, from behind, she gives him an affectionate hug.)

ELFRIDA. I'm real.

PROFESSOR. Thank God for that!— Well?

ELFRIDA. Oh, Grandpapa, I've had such a lovely time! You got my letter?

PROFESSOR. Yes, my dear— Oh, by the way, you've come just too late.

ELFRIDA. What for?

PROFESSOR. The Doctor, my dear. I wanted him to see you.

ELFRIDA. Why?

PROFESSOR. To tell me how you are.

ELFRIDA. But I'm quite well—ever so well!

PROFESSOR. I hope so, my dear, but one never knows.

ELFRIDA. I do! And Grandpapa, you got my present, didn't you?

PROFESSOR. Your present?

ELFRIDA. In my letter—What came off the tree that had fairies in it.

PROFESSOR. Oh, yes, yes. It's somewhere about here. (*He starts to search, then remembers*) Oh, no! It blew away:—it's on the floor somewhere.

ELFRIDA. And you *do* believe what I told you—don't you, Grandpapa?

PROFESSOR. Well—I've thought about it.

ELFRIDA. It was *true*— I *saw* them! You must believe that!

PROFESSOR. Well, I don't know— One isn't sure. So you've had a good time, eh?

ELFRIDA. Grandpapa— If you could only make people *know* there were fairies, wouldn't it be wonderful?

PROFESSOR. I suppose it would be, my dear.

ELFRIDA. But no one believes in them now, do they?

PROFESSOR. No, not usually.

ELFRIDA. Grandpapa, if you were ever able to find one— wouldn't it be grand?

PROFESSOR. Would it, my dear?

ELFRIDA. Did you ever try?

PROFESSOR. Once I did, for a short time. But if I were to, no one would believe me.

ELFRIDA. Oh, but if you found it and showed it to them, they'd have to.

PROFESSOR. Yes, I suppose they would, my dear.

ELFRIDA. And then you'd be ever such a great person—much greater than you are now!

PROFESSOR. But my dear, you—you don't understand. If people were told that Professor Braintree believed in faries—why, they would *laugh*!

ELFRIDA. You'd laugh, too—but you could laugh longer than they would.

PROFESSOR. Eh?

ELFRIDA. Why, it would be like a miracle! People would begin to *love* fairies again, then.

PROFESSOR. Well—perhaps. Green isn't my favorite color.

ELFRIDA. It's funny your saying that! The fairy I saw was green.

PROFESSOR. Was it?

ELFRIDA. And it had long horns, and its mouth and eyes were just like a young bird's (*This almost startles the PROFESSOR out of his skin. Blinking and munching, he sits staring, while ELFRIDA continues to deal her devastating blows*) And it ran round behind the tree, and when I got there, it was gone. If you'd been there, Grandpapa, to run round the other way——

PROFESSOR. Run round?

ELFRIDA. And if you'd had your butterfly net—(*This gives the PROFESSOR a fresh jerk*) Why, we could have caught it!

PROFESSOR. Well, I'm not so sure—? Perhaps.

ELFRIDA. But, Grandpapa, you *are* believing what I tell you, aren't you?— I saw it—*really* I did!

PROFESSOR. I would like to believe it, my dear— It would make a great difference to my state of health. When you saw it, didn't it upset you?

ELFRIDA. No!

PROFESSOR. It didn't frighten you?

ELFRIDA. No! Why?

PROFESSOR. Not even when you ran after it?

ELFRIDA. Why, no! Of course it ran, too. But it was quite nice about it.

PROFESSOR. Was it, indeed?

ELFRIDA. It made a noise at me—just like a bird—a nice bird.

PROFESSOR. Did it say "Sick, sick, sick, sick?"

ELFRIDA. No; it only went "Chewee! Chewee!"
—just like that!

PROFESSOR. Then I'm *not* mad after all!

ELFRIDA. Grandpapa, what's the matter?

PROFESSOR. My dear—you would really *like* to see that—that thing again?

ELFRIDA. Why, yes!

PROFESSOR. Green, and with horns, and eyes?—
Hear it again?

ELFRIDA. Yes.

PROFESSOR. Run after it again?—with a butterfly net?

ELFRIDA. And catch it? Oh, yes!

PROFESSOR. Well, my dear, there's—there's no accounting for tastes. But I begin to think that I'm not so mad as I thought I was.

ELFRIDA. I never thought you were mad, Grandpapa.

PROFESSOR. Thank you, my dear. I'm glad of that— Now, look here, you see that chest? This is the key to it— Now, will you go and open it? And don't be afraid of anything you find in it— It's all right.

(ELFRIDA goes and opens the chest. And while she stands for a moment looking in, nonplussed, there is much more excitement in the PROFESSOR'S demeanor than in hers.)

ELFRIDA. But, Grandpapa, there's nothing! Oh!
(At this cry of discovery the strain on the PROFESSOR'S feelings grows intense. ELFRIDA stoops and picks up something) Why, it's the leaf!— The leaf of that tree what I sent you!— Oh!

PROFESSOR. The leaf, you say?— Bring it here.

ELFRIDA. And it's all quite withered and dead!
(She brings it across to him, and the PROFESSOR looks at it with curious eyes.)

PROFESSOR. So it is, to be sure!— Quite withered

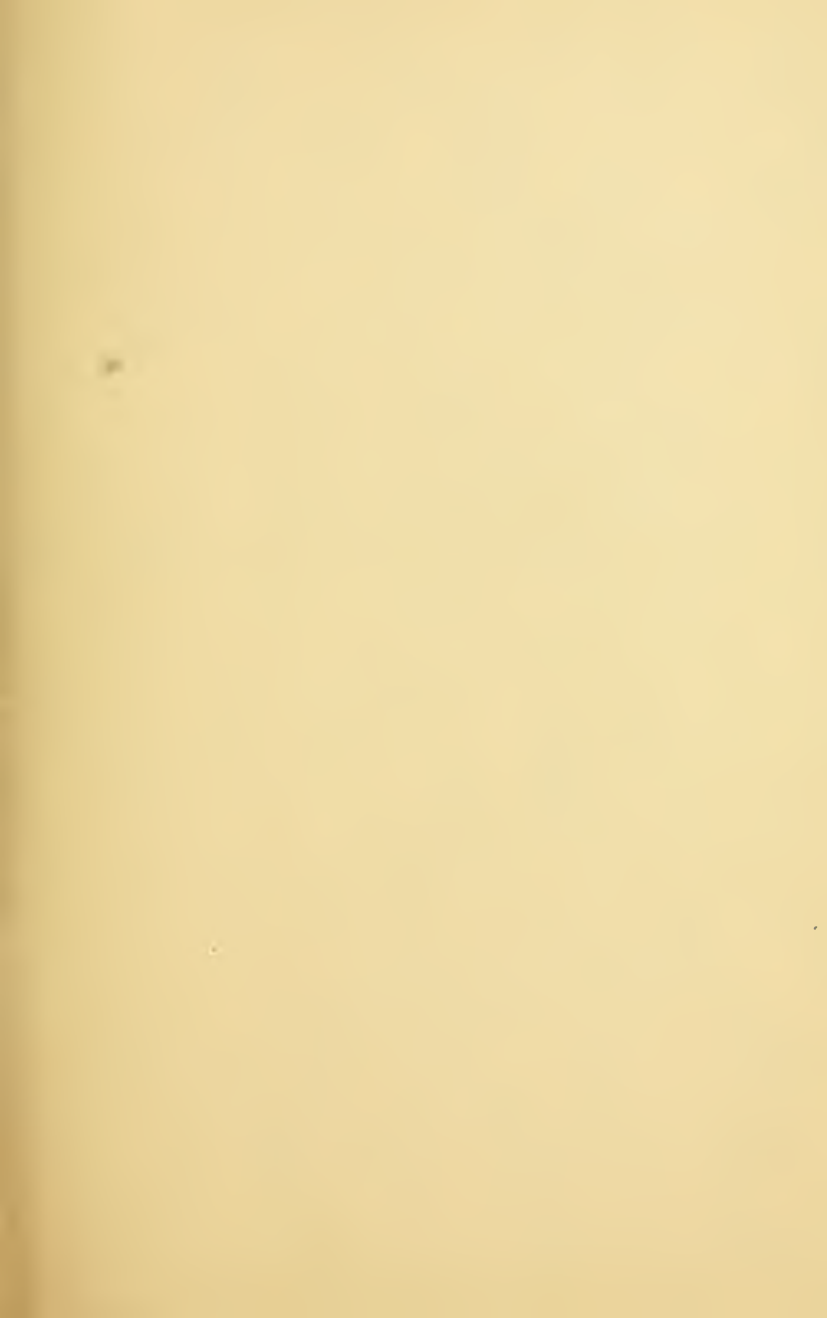
and dead. Well, there! Put it down, my dear, leave it alone!— And now you had better run away. I must get on with my work.

ELFRIDA. What shall I do with it, Grandpapa?

PROFESSOR. Put it in the waste-paper basket, my dear!— That's right. Now, run away!

(And so the dead leaf drops to its repose on a bed of scrapped science shiftings. From that fairy-funeral ELFRIDA turns, down-cast and sad, and with head bent and hands straight as though under some deep disgrace, goes softly out of the room. As the door closes behind her the PROFESSOR gives a look into the waste-paper basket, then heaves a sigh of relief, and goes on with his work.)

Curtain.





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